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SUBJECT: MALIKI CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE STEPS TO DEFUSE TURKISH CRISIS, HOSTAGE RELEASE CRITICAL; BASRAH TO PIC IN DECEMBER; APPROVES REFUGEE FUNDS

Classified By: Charge Patricia Butenis. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶11. (S) At the October 28 Ministerial Council on National Security (MCNS), Prime Minister Maliki called for immediate and practical steps to defuse the border crisis with Turkey, asking his ministers to focus on steps leading to the return of Turkish military hostages captured by the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and the need for a media campaign to forestall cross border operations. MinDef Qadr said that at last week's negotiations in Ankara, Turkey took the position that Iraqi proposals were inadequate. Iraq's interpretation of Turkey's failure to engage was that a decision had already been taken to carry out military action but to defer until after Erdogan's November 5 visit to Washington. The MCNS agreed to convene the Crisis Action Cell to consider options to defuse the immediate crisis as well as propose options should Turkey cross any Iraqi "red lines" during military operations. The MCNS also gave tentative approval to return Basrah to Provincial Iraqi Control on December 17 and discussed refugee assistance funding. END SUMMARY.

Report on Iraqi Delegation to Ankara

¶12. (S). The October 28 Ministerial Council on National Security (MCNS) focused on the GOI response to threats by Turkey to initiate cross border operations (CBO) in retaliation for attacks by the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and the PKK's capture of eight Turkish soldiers. DefMin Abdul Qadr, who led an Iraqi delegation to Ankara last week, briefed the MCNS about results of the talks. He told them his primary objective was prevention of a Turkish CBO, which he called a violation of Iraqi sovereignty. He recalled that during his opening remarks to the Turkish ForMin, he had declared the PKK a terrorist organization whose presence within Iraq was illegal. He said he emphasized that the GOI had prohibited all government interaction with the PKK and had closed all their offices; he noted that this prohibition on contact with the PKK applied to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) as well. Further, the GOI intended to honor all Interpol arrest warrants for PKK terrorists issued by the Turkish government. Additionally, Qadr said he outlined the following concrete steps the GOI would undertake to defuse the crisis:

- Establish a combined technical-military liaison mission composed of Turkish, Iraqi, and MNF-I elements to develop combined operations against the PKK
- Establish combined Turkish and Iraqi border patrols
- Rebuild a series of border posts in Northern Iraq using Turkish contractors

-- Renew tri-lateral (TU/IZ/USA) political discussions

-- Initiate a GOI request to MNF-I to share all intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance information (ISR) about PKK movements in Iraq

-- Order available KRG forces into action against the PKK

Turkish ForMin Says Iraqi Measures Not Enough

¶13. (S) DefMin Qadr reported that the Turkish ForMin stated these measures were simply not enough and voiced doubts about ability of the GOI to implement them. As an example, the Turkish ForMin brought up the issue of Camp Makmour--and its thousands of Turkish refugees*whom he accused of maintaining contact with PKK terrorist units. Qadr replied to each concern in turn. He noted MNF-I has the overall responsibility for Iraqi security including issues regarding the PKK. He cited briefings by the KRG to the Turkish representatives on actions already taken to isolate the PKK. Concerning Makmour, Qadr said he told the ForMin if the GOT granted amnesty to its residents, they could return home without fear of reprisals, and the camp would close.

Immediate Action Urged on Turkish Hostages

¶14. (S) MNF-I Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Operations, Major General Barbero--a U.S. advisor to the Iraqi delegation--concurred that the Turkish Government made it very clear the steps outlined by DefMin Qadr did not meet their expectations. The GOT expected physical action by the GOI against the PKK and time was of the essence.

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¶15. (S) Another U.S. advisor to the Iraqi delegation, Ambassador MQie Ries, said it was obvious the Turkish government was under enormous pressure to take military action. She emphasized that the primary issue for the GOT was the safe return of their eight military hostages held by the PKK. She reiterated General Barbero's assessment that the GOT wanted to see the Iraqis take immediate, direct, and very public physical action against the PKK, something which could defuse the anger of the Turkish populace. She Qed that the Turkish representatives repeatedly cited timing as a critical factor.

Iraqi ForMin Assesses Turkey Ready for War

¶16. (S) Foreign Minister Zebari, another senior Iraqi representative at the talks, took a harder line against the Turkish government, describing the atmosphere in Ankara as ready for war. He was convinced, he said, that the decision to invade Iraq had already been made before the Iraqi delegation arrived in Ankara. He expressed doubt that the GOT had any intention of engaging in dialogue. ForMin Zebari warned that Turkish forces massing along the northern border were far greater than necessary to destroy small groups of PKK terrorists. He expressed his opinion that the Turkish Prime Minister's visit to Washington would not be a discussion; rather, it would be a notification of impending military action by the GOT.

National Security Advisor Calls for Focused Action

¶17. (S) Attempting to calm this sentiment, National Security Advisor Rubaie said it was necessary to "take the fuse out of the bomb"; that is, it was absolutely essential that the GOI remained focused on efforts to release the Turkish military hostages by using all available means. He added that it was also important to work with the KRG at locating the people

indicted under valid Turkish arrest warrants.

¶18. (S) Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih was not as conciliatory, voicing his belief that the Turkish representatives at the talks in Ankara had behaved badly. He agreed with ForMin Zebari that Turkey was ready for war and Iraq needed to move quickly to avoid further escalation. Salih said the GOI should immediately activate the measures outlined by DefMin Qadr at Ankara whether or not the GOT believed them enough. He called for the Crisis Action Cell (CAC) to convene and develop options to prevent escalation of the crisis.

DefMin Qadr Wants Red Line at National Border

¶19. (S) DefMin Qadr concurred with immediate activation of the CAC but said it should develop contingency plans and define the "red lines" beyond which the GOI would have to take defensive actions. He insisted that one of those red lines was the national border and--like ForMin Zebari--also assessed the GOI would have to defend it shortly after the November 6 meeting between President Bush and PM Erdogan.

¶10. (S) Upon hearing this assessment, the Deputy Minister of Justice called on the MNF-I to protect Iraq from an invading Turkish military force under provisions of the UNSCR and asQ for a United Nations decision. He urged that all political measures must be taken to resolve the crisis.

Maliki Rejects Red Line, Calls for Action on Hostages

¶11. (S) Prime Minister Maliki dismissed the idea of a red line and stated he did not want the situation to escalate that far. In any case, he said, the GOI had no forces in place with which to defend the northern border. Maliki cQed instead for immediate and practical steps to avoid a Turkish CBO, particularly any action which would secure release of the Turkish hostages. Additionally, he urged mobilization of a full-scale media campaign which would highlight these positive actions by the GOI, including the arrest and expulsion of persons under valid Turkish warrants. These public actions, he said, would help defuse Turkish anger.

MNF-I CG Petraeus Urges Immediate, Practical Measures

¶12. (S) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus said the Iraqi delegation to Ankara should be congratulated for their important and constructive work in trying to find a solution to this crisis. He assessed it unlikely that the Turkish

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military would invade before the Turkish PM's visit to Washington, and noted, if they did eventually take action that they would not go very deep into Iraqi territory. He added that Turkey and its citizens had a vested interest in Northern Iraq where Turkey has invested some ten billion dollars and conducts an enormous amount of business. General Petraeus also expressed his belief that Turkey could make a good case--at the UN or anywhere else--for initiating cross border operations against the PKK. Reacting to Prime Minister Maliki's call for immediate and practical measures to defuse the crisis, he urged the GOI to once again denounce the PKK, declare their actions illegal, and make every effort to secure release of the Turkish military hostages. General Petraeus offered to participate in any CAC discussions and recommended the GOI consider further actions like cracking down on PKK funding and personnel resources flowing through Irbil and Sulaymaniyah airports. General Petraeus also offered to engage the GOI in discussions about combined US-Iraqi operations against the PKK.

Next Step: Crisis Action Cell

¶13. (S) A discussion ensued between PM Maliki and DPM Salih about options available to the GOI regarding the Turkish hostages. Both had heard reports that the PKK would exchange the hostages in return for full amnesty by the GOT. In the end, the matter was deferred to immediate consideration by the CAC for development of options.

Basrah PIC Gets Tentative Approval

¶14. (S) Turning to Basrah, NSA Rubaie requested a required MCNS decision on transfer of security responsibilities to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) on December 17. IntMin Bolani raised an immediate objection, saying only about 15 percent of the MOI forces were ready, citing issues with the border/coast guards and failure of FinMin Jabr to release funds for the purchase of equipment. DefMin Qadr said the Army was ready-to-go with most of its units near full readiness by December 17 and all expected to be at 100 percent readiness by February 2008. Bolani said this did not match the facts on the ground, citing severe clashes in Basrah last week, he said MOD forces had performed very poorly against coordinated Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) assaults. MOD Qadr rejected that assessment, calling the engagements a success story, even if not perfectly executed. PM Maliki repeated his oft-stated concerns about General Mohan's leadership and asked for a full report on the major violence which occurred last week. DefMin Qadr offered to go to Basrah himself and investigate.

¶15. (S) General Petraeus agreed with MinDef Qadr, assessing the Army's response to JAM as generally adequate and slowly improving. He suggested that in future engagements in Basrah, the military and police commanders consider the use of the Iraqi special operations forces located at the airport and available to GEN Mohan. Deputy NSA Safa pointed out that the PIC process would not immediately change the number of security forces within a province; rather, it would change the relationship between MNF-I and the provincial government. Before PIC, the MNF-I had the lead (although, MND-SE has already, at Iraqi request, essentially moved into an over-watch situation); after PIC, the provincial government would take the lead in security operations but always had the option of calling on MNF-I forces if necessary. The MCNS gave a tentative approval to continue planning for a Basrah PIC date of December 17.

Refugee Funding

16 (C) ForMin Zebari urged the Prime Minister to release the \$25 million it had pledged for Iraqi refugees in neighboring countries. Deputy PM Saleh endorsed the request, noting that the money should be provided to the Syrian Red Cross. CDA Butenis advised Maliki that this matter had been pending for quite a while and it would be good to announce this funding for Iraqi refugees at the Istanbul Extended Neighbors Ministerial. PM Maliki said it had already been decided to release the funds and the Minister of Finance had been instructed to do so. Amb. Ries met next day (Monday, October 29) with Zebari, who clearly stated that, regardless of Maliki's instructions the previous night, that more work needs to be done with the PM to ensure the funds are released.
BUTENIS